PITTA

Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 22 Number 13 December 2025

FIELD TRIP-1: Sunday, December 14, 2025, 6.30AM: Mokila. Meeting Point(s): Morine Bakery, Narsingi, 06:00AM. Coordinator(s): Sathwik Reddy (Mobile: 99858-07186)

Mokila is a dry-deciduous scrub habitat which holds a rich birding. This place serves as an important habitat for various bird species due to its diverse environments. The combination of agricultural areas and water bodies not only enhances its ecological richness but also makes it a significant spot for birdwatching enthusiasts. Birdwatchers visiting Mokila are encouraged to maintain an ethological approach to observing and documenting the avifauna. Some common species found in this area are Eurasian Collared Dove, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Small Minivet, Bay-backed Shrike, Siberian Stonechat, Eurasian Hoopoe, Wire-tailed Swallow and many more.

FIELD TRIP-2: Sunday, December 21, 2025, 6.00AM: Ananthagiri Hills, Vikarabad. Meeting Point(s): NMDC Main Gate, Mehdipatnam, 05:20AM; Telangana State Police Academy, Chilkur Balaji Temple Road, 05:40AM. Coordinator(s): Sathwik Reddy (Mobile: 99858-07186)

Ananthagiri Hills is a picturesque and ecologically rich area known for its diverse flora, fauna, and scenic landscapes. Situated near Vikarabad, the Ananthagiri Hills forest area forms part of a larger bio-geographically significant region that includes the Nallamala Hills and other parts of the Eastern Ghats. The Ananthagiri Hills forest has a mix of tropical dry deciduous and semi-evergreen forests. The varied landscape, with rolling hills, deep valleys, grasslands and fast-flowing streams, provides a perfect habitat for a wide range of wildlife. Home to a vast array of plant species, including tropical trees such as teak, bamboo, tamarind, *neem*, and *mahua*, along with medicinal plants, shrubs, and flowering plants, the area is also rich in various species of ferns and orchids. The forest is a biodiversity hotspot, particularly known for its vibrant birdlife; a wide variety of bird species, including flycatchers, warblers and woodpeckers, are frequently observed in the area. Many common woodland birds along with migratory birds also visit the region during the cooler months, further adding to its avian diversity. Ananthagiri Hills has a rich bird list of more than 260 species (as per eBird).

Both trips will be half-day trips, so carry adequate water and breakfast/snacks, and protective gear if required. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. New Deccan Birders hats and caps will be available for purchase; please carry adequate cash.

Trip Report: Birding in Zurich, Switzerland, September 14-18, 2025

Text & Photos: Dr Krishna Nagarajan

View from the hotel window in Baden, Zurich

A couple of months back, a work requirement took me to Baden, a suburb of Zurich, Switzerland. Usually, I look forward to such trips as they help break the monotony and expand my world view. However, this time around, I had just recovered from Chikungunia and was still under the severe grip of the arthritis flare-up that comes as an aftermath. So my goal was to primarily focus on the business meetings and if my health was up to it, do some basic trekking/birding (besides the famous Swiss banks, Zurich is also known for its diverse trekking options).

Fearing backlash from my family, I decided it was best to not divulge my plan for extra-curricular activities during the trip. I stealthily packed my Nikon bridge camera and a generous supply of Crocin Pain Relief tablets.

The weather in Zurich during the month of September is somewhat similar to our early winter months in Hyderabad. There is daylight all the way up to 8:30-9:00PM in the evening, giving plenty of outdoor time to explore after business hours. I checked into my hotel around 4:00PM and, when I looked outside the window, the view was surreal. It was a blend of the old and the new – there were green hills in the distance, old and new style buildings, a metro train running on a bridge, lots of trees and shrubs nearby, the Limmat river, and a lamp post!

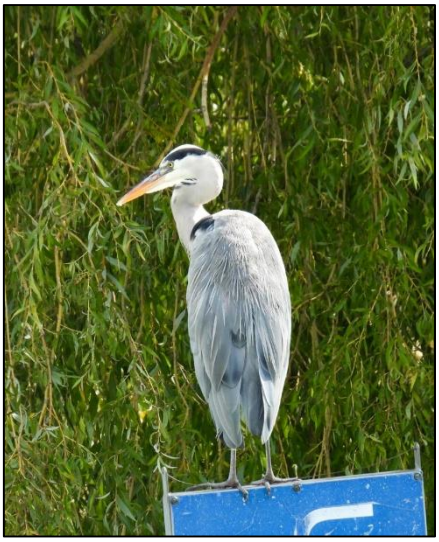
Given my health condition, I thought how nice it would be if all the birds just came one by one and sat on the lamp post – I know that was a big ask but in my defense, I was barely walking and I was not familiar with the local birds. I needed to take their pictures to be able to identify and study them offline. A Common Raven came and sat on the lamp post as if to pacify me! I also managed to sight a Common Redstart and a Garden Warbler from the hotel window.

Common Raven

Western Reef Egret

The next day, after completing my business meetings, I scanned e-Bird to check what I can expect to see in and around the hotel I was staying at. Surprisingly there were no listings available. The Limmat River stream was flowing within a few meters from the hotel and there was a trail along the stream. I decided to explore the trail. Should I go left or right? There was no sign of any humans on either side of the track. As if to help me arrive at an answer, three Mallards flew by towards my right – so right it was!

After walking for about 500 meters, I ran into a bund. I first noticed the familiar Grey Heron sitting on a sign board along the embankment. There were several Eurasian Coots and Mallards (males, females, and some juveniles) swimming in the water.



Grey Heron

Red Kite

Eurasian Moorhen adult

Common Pochard

A Red Kite was hovering in the sky. I crossed the bund and continued walking slowly along the trail. I noticed Common Pochard, Eurasian Moorhen, and Common Merganser along the way.

Poster showing the birds of the Limmat River

After a few hundred meters, I noticed a sign board along the bank. It had pictures of birds along with their names in their local language (probably German). I was delighted – I am walking along a trail which seems to be popular for bird watching!

Yellow-legged Gull

I limped along with vigour further down the trail. In the middle of the stream, I noticed a Yellow-legged Gull with a carcass of what looked like a Mallard. It was a large Gull, but could it have preyed upon the Mallard? I don't know.

Common Chaffinch

A sign post showed 19km to Zurich downtown. I realized that this is a long trail and I can't keep walking. At some point I need to turn back and head to the hotel. I noticed a Common Chaffinch further down the trail and decided to walk some more. I also spotted another bird, about the size of Common Myna, dark brownish in color with some striations on the head and neck, nestled among the red berries on a tree branch. I could not recognize immediately, but was able to take nice pictures. Later, I found out that this was the female Eurasian Blackbird.

Eurasian Blackbird female

I was exhausted and decided it was time to turn back to the hotel. It was around 7:30PM, but the evening sun was still shining brightly. I decided to relax a bit on the bench overlooking the river stream. A pair of Mallards and a Little Grebe were swimming slowly along the bank and within a couple of meters from the bench where I was sitting.

Mallard male

Mallard female

The female Mallard came out of the water and started slowly walking towards me. I was not expecting this. My brain became silent but my amygdala started processing – flight or fight? In an alien country, I am sitting alone on a bench along a trail with no other humans in sight. A skirmish with an avian is not an engagement I need in my current condition. But on the other hand, it's just a Mallard – definitely not going to bite. I sat still and our eyes were locked. I sensed grace in its eyes as it continued walking towards me. Then it occurred to me that it may be expecting me to offer some food!

It was probably used to people feeding food and was comfortable enough to approach me without fear. It was disappointed when I had nothing to offer and walked back to the stream.

Great Cormorant immature

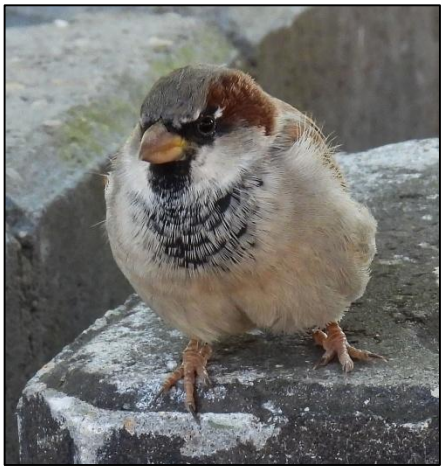
I sat there for some more time and noticed some movement on the walnut tree nearby. I could not spot the bird, but decided to take a picture where I saw some movement. Later, I was elated when I noticed that the picture actually captured a Eurasian Blue Tit sandwiched between two walnut fruits!

Eurasian Blue Tit

On the way back to the hotel, I ran into a juvenile Eurasian Moorhen and the Grey Heron was still hanging around near the bund.

Eurasian Moorhen juvenile

On my day off, I decided to explore Zurich downtown. Most downtowns usually have a lake or a river flowing through. As we have our own Hussainsagar Lake, downtown Zurich has Lake Zurich from which the Limmat River flows out and passes by Baden, where my hotel was located. Several parks and trails were located around the lake, and e-Bird showed a good count of birds that can be sighted.



House Sparrow male

House Sparrow female

I started walking through the parks from the Southern side of the lake. I immediately saw a bunch of House Sparrows hopping around. A bit further, I ran into a flock of Blue Rock Pigeons. One of the birds in this flock stood out in its plumage and at first I thought it was a different bird. Later I realized it was a melanistic Blue Rock Pigeon – it had a dark bluish color all around.

Melanistic Blue Rock Pigeon

Common Wood Pigeon

Eurasian Blackbird male

White Wagtail

I then spotted the Carrion Crow, Common Wood Pigeon, European Robin, Eurasian Blackbird (male), and the White Wagtail.

Herring Gull adult

Herring Gull juvenile

Black-headed Gull

I moved around and reached closer to the lake shore to find the Great and Little Cormorants, Herring and Black-headed Gulls, and a juvenile Eurasian Coot. I was surprised at how different the juvenile Coot looked and the transformation it would undergo when it becomes an adult. The juvenile had a yellow-orangish beak, white plumage on the face, chest, and had dark black eyes. On reaching adulthood, it would become completely black with just a white patch on the forehead and reddish eyes. And then the feet – did you ever notice the beautiful pattern in an adult's feet?

Eurasian Coot juvenile

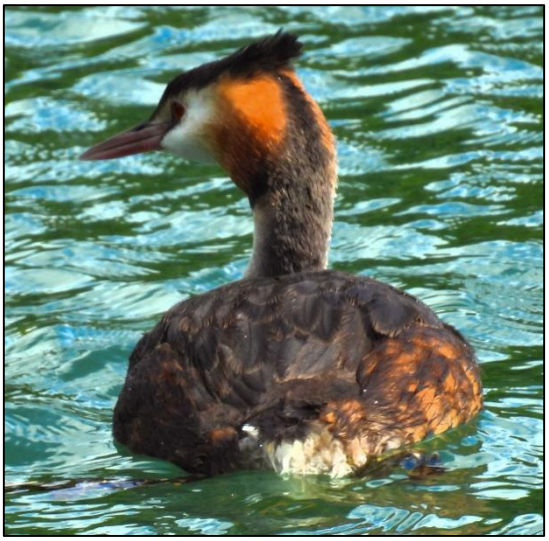
Eurasian Coot adult

Red-crested Pochard male

Red-crested Pochard female

I walked along the shore and cleared all the tourist yachts that were lined up. In the middle of the lake, I found the Red-crested Pochard, a pair of Mute Swans, and the Great Crested Grebe.

Mute Swan



Great Crested Grebe in breeding plumage

Great Crested Grebe non-breeding

There were several Eurasian Coots and Mallards as well. I picked up a cup of coffee and settled down to recharge. Within the next few weeks winter will settle in and most of these birds will start migrating to the South – maybe some of them will travel all the way to our neighbourhood. While I fly back home in a metal cage, these birds will fly in the open blue sky. Envious? You bet!

Blue Rock Pigeon

The list of birds seen during the trip:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Eurasian Blackbird	*Turdus merula*	15	Eurasian Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*
2	Common Redstart	*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*	16	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*
3	Eurasian Blue Tit	*Cyanistes caeruleus*	17	Common Raven	*Corvus corax*
4	Mute Swan	*Cygnus olor*	18	Common Chaffinch	*Fringilla coelebs*
5	Black-headed Gull	*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*	19	Great Crested Grebe	*Podiceps cristatus*
6	Mallard	*Anas platyrhynchos*	20	Yellow-legged Gull	*Larus michahellis*
7	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	21	Common Pochard	*Aythya ferina*
8	White Wagtail	*Motacilla alba*	22	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*
9	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*	23	Red Kite	*Milvus milvus*
10	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	24	Carrion Crow	*Corvus corone*
11	Blue Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	25	Common Merganser	*Mergus merganser*
12	Common Wood Pigeon	*Columba palumbus*	26	European Robin	*Erithacus rubecula*
13	Red-crested Pochard	*Netta rufina*	27	Garden Warbler	*Sylvia borin*
14	Western Reef Egret	*Egretta gularis*	28	Herring Gull	*Larus argentatus*

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Trip Report: Narsapur Reserve Forest, October 19, 2025

Text and Photos: Gurukumar KR

Deccan Birders organized the monthly field trip to Narsapur Reserve Forest, located about 50km from Hyderabad in Medak District, on October 19, 2025. Spanning nearly 3,500 hectares, this dry deciduous forest is a mosaic of rocky outcrops and ponds – a favourite destination for birders seeking both forest and wetland species.

Journey and Weather

The convoy started early from Hyderabad, with participants joining at Punjagutta and Dindigul AFS points. The drive was refreshing, and as always, troops of monkeys lining the roadside signalled the beginning of the Narsapur forest stretch. The day was pleasantly cool and crisp after recent rains, lending the forest a fresh, earthy scent and adding sparkle to the morning light filtering through the canopy.

Forest Trail — Medalamma Temple Side

The group's first stop was near the Medalamma Temple area, where the forest slowly came alive with the dawn chorus. A much-awaited moment for many was the sighting of the Jerdon's Leafbird – high on the wish list of several birders visiting this region. There she was, perched beautifully and calling persistently. Cameras clicked in unison as the bright green bird posed amidst the foliage. Though the light was subdued, the Leafbird's repeated, liquid calls became one of the most memorable sounds of the morning.

Jerdon's Leafbird

Soon, the birding trail deepened into the forest canopy, and activity picked up. Woodpeckers provided a delightful show – both the Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker and Yellow-crowned Woodpecker were seen energetically drilling into bark in search of insects. The rhythmic tapping echoed softly through the trees.

Spotted Dove

The usual forest regulars soon followed – Jungle Babbler flocks, Red-vented Bulbuls, Spotted Doves, Indian Paradise-flycatchers, and Tickell's Blue Flycatchers darting among sunlit branches. The White-browed Bulbul, often heard but seldom seen, kept challenging birders to spot it among the dense canopy with its teasing calls.

Plum-headed Parakeet female

Recent rains had left the forest floor moist, and a large water body had formed midway, gently limiting our movement. Yet, that natural clearing surrounded by trees turned into a perfect observation point. As the rising sun illuminated dried branches, birds emerged from their roosts – Rose-ringed and Plum-headed Parakeets, Indian White-eyes, Indian Golden Orioles, and Green Bee-eaters among them.

Indian Golden Oriole male

After a hearty birding session, the group began walking back. As we began to retrace our steps, the morning light grew softer, and the forest seemed to wake up anew. It was then that the migrants began to make their presence felt. A flash of turquoise blue announced the arrival of the Verditer Flycatcher, its vivid plumage glistening even in the gentle shade – a sure sign that the winter migrants are arriving in the Deccan.

Verditer Flycatcher

Asian Brown Flycatcher

Nearby, the Asian Brown Flycatcher, more modestly attired in soft browns and greys, made quick sallies from its perch to catch insects mid-air. The contrast between these visiting flycatchers and our familiar Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, with its rich orange breast and indigo-blue head, was striking – a reminder of the seasonal rhythm that brings new life and colour to Narsapur's canopies each year.

Indian Grey Hornbill

To cap the morning, an Indian Grey Hornbill made a majestic appearance, perched openly for everyone to enjoy before gliding away into the trees.

Towards Narsapur Lake

After the forest trail, the group moved towards the Narsapur Lake area, which lies closer to the town. Here, the contrast between nature and encroaching urbanization was stark. The once-wooded stretch along the road, with its ancient temple ruins, has now been largely cleared. Fencing and signs of an Eco-Park were visible – a reminder of changing landscapes and the delicate balance between conservation and development.

Despite this, the lake itself, rejuvenated by recent rains, offered a serene sight. The expanded waters gave a sense of its true scale and former glory. The group sat quietly on the banks for a while, watching birds and monkeys going about their morning routines.

One of the most memorable moments here was witnessing a River Tern diving sharply to catch a fish, only to be chased mid-air by another tern trying to snatch the catch – a thrilling display of skill and survival.

Along the banks, White-throated and Common Kingfishers, Little Cormorants, Little Egrets, Grey Herons, and Ashy Woodswallows completed the lake's avian ensemble.

Common Kingfisher

Overall Experience

The Narsapur field trip beautifully combined the quiet charm of forest birding with the liveliness of wetland activity. While the signs of habitat change were unmistakable near the lake, the forest still offered moments of calm and wonder that every birder cherishes – the rhythmic call of the Leafbird, the steady hammering of Woodpeckers, and the sight of kingfishers and terns slicing through the air. It was a deeply satisfying outing, reminding everyone of both the rich biodiversity that surrounds Hyderabad and the responsibility to preserve it.

Small Minivet male

The group at the trip

The list of birds seen during the trip:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	30	Ashy Woodswallow	*Artamus fuscus*
2	Spotted Dove	*Spilopelia chinensis*	31	Common Woodshrike	*Tephrodornis pondicerianus*
3	Laughing Dove	*Spilopelia senegalensis*	32	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*
4	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	*Treron phoenicopterus*	33	White-bellied Drongo	*Dicrurus caerulescens*
5	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	34	Indian Paradise-flycatcher	*Terpsiphone paradisi*
6	Common Hawk Cuckoo	*Hierococcyx varius*	35	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*
7	Little Swift	*Apus affinis*	36	Asian Tit (Cinereous)	*Parus cinereus*
8	White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*	37	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*
9	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	38	Eastern Red-rumped Swallow	*Cecropis daurica hyperythra*
10	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	39	White-browed Bulbul	*Pycnonotus luteolus*
11	River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*	40	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
12	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*	41	Greenish Warbler	*Phylloscopus trochiloides*
13	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	42	Indian White-eye	*Zosterops palpebrosus*
14	Eastern Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus coromandus*	43	Jungle Babbler	*Argya striata*
15	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*	44	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
16	Changeable Hawk Eagle (Crested)	*Nisaetus cirrhatus*	45	Asian Brown Flycatcher	*Muscicapa dauurica*
17	Indian Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros birostris*	46	Indian Robin	*Copsychus fulicatus*
18	Asian Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*	47	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*
19	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	48	Oriental White-eye	*Zosterops palpebrosus*
20	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	49	Verditer Flycatcher	*Eumyias thalassinus*
21	Coppersmith Barbet	*Psilopogon haemacephalus*	50	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	*Cyornis tickelliae*
22	Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	*Yungipicus nanus*	51	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*
23	Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	*Leiopicus mahrattensis*	52	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*
24	Black-rumped Flameback	*Dinopium benghalense*	53	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*
25	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*	54	Jerdon's Leafbird	*Chloropsis jerdoni*
26	Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula cyanocephala*	55	Tricolored Munia	*Lonchura malacca*
27	Small Minivet	*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*	56	Yellow-throated Sparrow	*Gymnoris xanthocollis*
28	Indian Cuckooshrike	*Coracina macei*	57	Grey Wagtail	*Motacilla cinerea*
29	Indian Golden Oriole	*Oriolus kundoo*	58	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*

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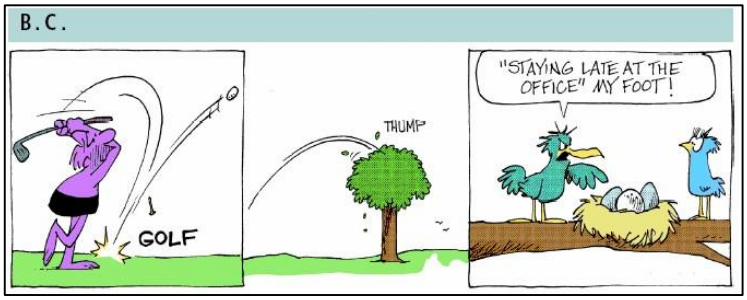
Bird Humour

Umesh Mani



(From Facebook, August 19, 2022)

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We wish all our members a Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year 2026!

Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Heart-spotted Woodpecker (*Hemicircus canente*)

Heart-spotted Woodpecker
Pair (L) (Dandeli, October 31, 2024) **& Female (R)** (Thattekad, Kerala, September 30, 2017)

Order:	Piciformes
Family:	Picidae
Genus:	*Hemicircus*
Species:	*H. canente*
Size:	16 cm
IUCN Status:	Least Concern

Description & distribution: The Heart-spotted Woodpecker is a small woodpecker that is widely distributed across large parts of Asia, including south-western and central India, the Himalayas, and east into Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Northern birds are slightly larger in size than the ones closer to the equator.

It has a slightly top-heavy appearance, with a large crest that makes the head look too large for its small body and short rounded tail. Both male and female are predominantly black, with heart-shaped black spots on their white shoulders that give the bird its name. They also have broad white scapular patches and barring on flight feathers. The forehead and crown is buff on the female, and black with small white spots on the male. It has a white throat and dark grey underparts. It is a monotypic species – no subspecies are recognized: *H. c. cordatus*, described by TC Jerdon from the Western Ghats, is not considered distinct.

Habitat & behaviour: The Heart-spotted Woodpecker prefers tropical or subtropical moist lowland and foothill forests - particularly dense and wet areas with bamboo and teak, although it is also seen in drier forests. It is easily identified by its oversized head on a stubby body, and its tendency to frequently call while foraging also makes it easy to locate. It typically forages in pairs or small groups, flying from tree to tree in sharp, short flights, and may also join mixed hunting parties. Its main diet consists of invertebrates and other insects like ants, grubs and termites that it picks up from under the bark of thin outer branches, although it is also known to probe *Cassia fistula* pods for insect larvae. The calls include a twangy *ki-yeww*, a sharp *twee-twee-twee* trilling call which sometimes leads to a duet of several notes, and a series of *su-see* calls.

Nesting: The Heart-spotted Woodpecker breeds mainly between November and April. The nest is usually a 3-4cm hole in a dead tree, with the tunnel sloping down about 20cm before it widens into a chamber. The usual clutch consists of 2-3 unmarked white eggs.

Local name: The Heart-spotted Woodpecker is known as *'Shyamdil lakkad khod'* or *'Tapkilo lakkadkhod'* in Gujarati, *'Pulli maramkotti'* or *'Chitranghan'* in Malayalam and *'Badami thipkyancha sutarpakshi'* in Marathi. It is also sometimes referred to as the Shakespeare Bird or Sweetheart in birding circles.

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